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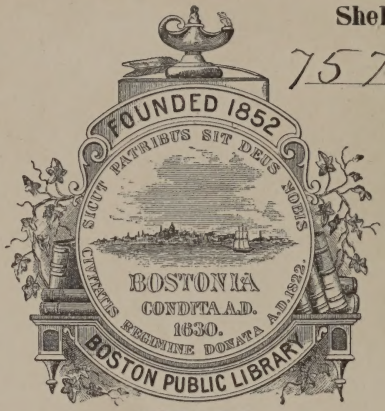

GIVEN BY
Rev. C. D. Bradlee,
Oct. 28, 1868

7573.116

A SERMON

BEFORE THE

FATHERLESS AND WIDOWS' SOCIETY.

By EZRA S. GANNETT.

1849

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A

SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE

7573.116

FATHERLESS AND WIDOWS' SOCIETY,

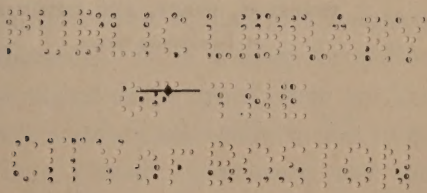
In the Central Church,

ON SUNDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 28, 1849.

BY

EZRA S. GANNETT.

MINISTER OF THE FEDERAL STREET CONGREGATION



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MDCCCXLIX.

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Rev. C. D. Bradlee. Oct. 28, 1868.

Mass 7441.57

BOSTON:

THURSTON, TORREY, AND EMERSON,

21 Devonshire Street.

SERMON.

JAMES I. 27.

VISIT THE FATHERLESS AND WIDOWS IN THEIR AFFLICTION.

It is one of the peculiarities of a Christian community, that they are often called to swell the streams of beneficence that refresh the dry and hard region of human want. The frequency of such invitation is an indirect acknowledgment of their claim to the character which should belong to a Christian community. It affords presumptive proof that they are worthy of the name they bear. In Heathen lands we do not hear, nor expect to hear, of numerous benevolent associations. In countries where unbelief had nourished the selfish propensities of our nature we should not look for the multiplication of agencies designed to relieve human distress. It is among the followers of Him who went about doing good, that we shall find the charities which soften and enliven the social state springing up in a blessed luxuriance, and unfolding their life in various forms of beneficence.

Instead, therefore, of any necessity under which the friends of a benevolent institution are laid, of prefac-

ing their solicitation for the means of increasing its efficiency with apologetic words, their appeal to the community about them, is, in effect, an expression of confidence, alike honorable and acceptable to those whom they address. As these calls are multiplied, however, discrimination becomes needful, and they who wish to act in obedience to good judgment, as well as generous impulse, will demand some explanation of the purposes of the institution which they are requested to aid, and of the circumstances which enforce its claim on their regard. It is a strongly marked characteristic of the people of this city, that while they give liberally to an object of which they approve, they do not bestow their approbation ignorantly or precipitately. Their first response to the advocate of any charitable enterprise is the inquiry, — altogether proper and pertinent, — Can you show us that this is a practicable and wise undertaking? If it be impracticable, we should but throw away whatever we might intrust to you; if it be unwise, a higher motive than prudence must restrain us from encouraging an injudicious liberality. There is only one reply that can be made to such reasoning, and it consists in a satisfactory exposition of the aims and plans of those who are responsible for the conduct of the enterprise.

The grounds on which a benevolent association may solicit assistance in carrying out its purpose, are either such as underlay all philanthropic effort, or such as especially recommend the object for which that association is formed. The general considerations which sustain all benevolent action are too familiar to our minds to render any attempt at elaborate statement

necessary. There is a heart in man, and that heart prompts him to care for his fellow-man. There is a conscience in each of us, which disquiets us if we neglect the needy and helpless. There is a necessity of mutual dependence from which we cannot escape, and a law of mutual obligation under which every one is placed by the constitution of his being. The sufferer appeals, whether through audible entreaty or by the unspoken eloquence of his condition, to sympathies of our nature that become sponsors for the fulfilment of our duties towards him. In spite of the selfishness that has filled the world with neglected misery, so strong is the universal conviction of what we owe to one another, that to leave a fellow-creature to suffer, unaided and unpitied, is pronounced *inhuman*, or a denial of the attributes that constitute us men; while, for the performance of those acts which relieve distress and raise the destitute out of their despair, we can find no other word so proper as *humanity*, or a compliance with the dictates of our own nature. A man only obeys the promptings of a natural sensibility when he renders an office of compassion; he proves his *manhood* by his sympathy with misfortune. Among the most barbarous people, and in the worst times of civilized history, men have bestowed their approbation, and their admiration, on those who have placed themselves as barriers between the wretched and the ruin which threatened them. The widest social corruption could not wholly stifle the voice, the burthen of whose charge was as brief as it was authoritative, — "Pity the unfortunate."

The religions of Paganism, and the philosophies of

an unsanctified reason, however, paid little attention to the humane, though it was the essentially human, element in our nature. A divinely communicated revelation was needed, to add its authority to the law written indeed on the heart, but obscured by the influences which ignorance and sin had shed, like the effacing stains of our northern atmosphere on the inscriptions cut into veinless marble. Such authority has been added, in terms whose meaning cannot be misunderstood. One of the strongest points of contrast between the institutions of Moses and the morality that grew up beneath the superstition or priestcraft of Heathenism, is seen in the place assigned by the former to acts of beneficence, as compared with the neglect with which they are treated by the latter. The Old Testament, from its record of the days of Abraham to the final strain of prophetic instruction, exhibits and enjoins the offices of a generous humanity. "Ye shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child," said the lawgiver of Israel. "Thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hand from thy poor brother, but thou shalt open thy hand wide, and shalt surely give him." Nor was this a charity bounded by the lines of national existence, for the *stranger* is repeatedly included under the same language of compassionate interest with those whose sorrows entitled them to tender regard. "Oppress not the widow nor the fatherless, the stranger nor the poor." Most emphatic is that description of the Almighty given by the Hebrew Psalmist, when, after calling on his people to "extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name Jehovah," that name which the Jew pronounced with

the utmost reverence, he adds, "A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation," — connecting both the greatness and the holiness of God with the claims of these bereaved ones. Proceeding on from the Jewish morning to the Christian meridian light, we find in the New Testament, that concern for the poor and sympathy with the distressed are duties which our Lord's teaching and life bring into singular prominence. His own ministry, what an example of beneficent labor! His Gospel, a gift, may we not say, specially designed for the poor! His command, — "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself!" His promise, — "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy!" The early believers imbibed their Master's spirit. Not only was the primitive Church thoroughly democratic in its constitution, but the disciples severally felt themselves bound to care for their poor brethren. An order of ministers was appointed to this particular service, and the Apostles, amidst the vast responsibilities of their position, when the faith, the civilization, and the spiritual life of future generations hung on their fidelity to the work specially committed to them, did not think that to plant a new theology, or to infuse a new spirit into the world, closed their mission; but in every epistle which they wrote, if not in every discourse that they delivered, urged upon their fellow Christians the exercise of a free and large beneficence. When James and Cephas and John, with Paul and Barnabas, divided the Roman empire between them, as the field in which they should sow the seed of divine truth, they laid on each other's souls the charge "to remember the poor."

It is a very striking passage in that early history of our religion. How hearty is Paul's commendation of those who made a contribution for the poor saints, whom they knew only through the sympathies of a common nature and a common worship! What a glow of indignant remonstrance is that, with which James rebukes the deference paid to wealth even in the Christian assembly,—"Hearken, my beloved brethren; hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?" And what could be more decisive than the declaration of the same Apostle, pronounced with the brevity, but without the ambiguity, of an oracle whose words none would dare to dispute,—"Pure religion and undefiled before God, even the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep one's self unspotted from the world." The performance of kind actions is here placed on the same level of duty—rather let me say, on the same height of excellence—with personal piety.

But why labor to establish a point on which none whom I address entertain a doubt? "To do good and to communicate," is at once the dictate of nature and the result of Christian culture. Whatever be our own habits, we never withhold our admiring approval from generous deeds or disinterested sacrifices. Let me hold up two pictures before your sight, and while one shall inspire aversion, the other will detain your hearts in sympathetic contemplation.

See you that man,—you know him, perhaps, by name; if not, his character marks him as one whom

you will not forget, — whose sole purpose in life is personal gratification? He has an open hand, but a miserly heart, for all he spends is for and upon himself. The poor call at his door, and leave it as empty as they came. Hungry children meet him in the street, and are chilled by his cold glance. The distributor of a bounty, which it is far more burthensome to collect from the rich than to scatter among the destitute, solicits his gratuity, and encounters a polite or rough refusal, according to the station in society which the applicant may occupy. Suffering and want send up their entreaties to him on every side, but he walks on as heedless of others' necessities as if the world in which he lives contained neither poverty nor distress. They whom oppression has wounded, or misfortune stripped, lie in his way, but he neither crosses over to avoid, nor stops to observe them; for he sees them not, nor hears their groans, so absorbed is he in his selfish pursuit of gain, or pleasure, or whatever it be on which he has set his heart. Yet he is an honest man, as the world interpret honesty; an honorable man, as he defines honor; a gentleman, according to the standard of an artificial code of manners; but a poor, cold-hearted, miserable traitor to the interests which he was sent into the world to serve, an incumbrance to the earth in the sight of God, and in our sight.

Look now at that neighbor on the other side, — I need not call him by name, you know him well, and there are many like him, — whose heart is full of considerate kindness, which it delights him to convert into benevolent action. Tender, thoughtful, and consist-

ent, impulse and principle, religious faith and long cherished habit unite in making him a benefactor to the community in which he lives, by the example of generous self-forgetfulness which he presents. Without ostentation, he spreads around him an influence that causes many hearts to rejoice. The destitute find in him a helper; the wretched, a friend. The outcast he will not despise; the sinful he will not crush with Pharisaic rebuke, but persuade by earnest counsel to seek the path from which they have wandered. The widow and the fatherless lean on his arm; the solitary mourner is comforted by his presence, the cold and bare apartment is made habitable by his liberality; the wealth which he has inherited, or the property which he has acquired, he values for the privilege with which it endows him of lessening the evils that afflict his fellow-beings; and his life he accounts as well spent only as he imitates the philanthropy of Jesus, and aspires to copy the perfection of Him who "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Here is one worthy to bear the name of a man, to cherish the hope of a Christian!

Within the wide circumference described by these general remarks, still lie questions that arise upon every new application for aid to a benevolent enterprise. Is it feasible? Does it deserve encouragement? Are they "worthy, for whom" we "should do this?" It falls to me now to answer these questions in behalf of the Society at whose request we have met; and I conceive that I shall best execute the service with which I have been intrusted, by informing

you of the design and efforts of this voluntary association.

First, then, let me draw your attention to the fact, that it is an association of women for the relief of others of their own sex. Those who solicit your contributions to-night are all women; the officers, the managers, the members of this Society are all women. This is not a strange circumstance in our city; there are many female associations designed to relieve human want. But it is a circumstance not to be overlooked. "Help those women who labored with me in the gospel, I entreat of thee," says the Apostle in his letter to the Philippian church; and methinks it is no violent exercise of the imagination, that would enable us to hear him saying to us now, Help these women who are laboring in the spirit of the gospel, which ye profess to honor. A Christian audience should not turn away from the solicitation which a company of Christian women address to their hearts. It is a memorable fact in the history of divine revelation, that it has raised woman from degradation and neglect to a worthier position in society. Under the institutions of Paganism, her sex was treated contumeliously and basely. She was made the drudge of man, or the instrument of gratifying his vile passions; in either case denied her rights, and deprived of her natural influence. That a Cleopatra or a Zenobia ascended the throne, or a Sappho won applause by her poetic talent, does not form an exception to this remark, for in them we only see the force of character or of genius surmounting the obstacles which on every side tended to depress their sex. The sacred relations of home, as

we understand them, were unknown among the more polished nations of antiquity; the Greek in this respect exhibiting no superiority to those whom he proudly styled barbarians. Corinth, the wealthy and refined, was the seat of voluptuousness. In Athens the title of mistress was more honored than that of wife, although it expressed the most pitiable condition to which woman could be reduced. It is not in profane literature that you must look for a just estimation of the wife, the mother, or the daughter. Where, then, shall we find woman regarded in a proper light? In the Bible, — in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, — in the records of that people and those times, over which God extended a peculiar care. From the age of the patriarchs, through the history of Miriam, the sister of the Jewish lawgiver, of Deborah who judged Israel, of Hannah the mother of Samuel, of her whose son Elijah restored to life, through the writings of Moses, of Solomon, and of the Prophets, woman is mentioned with respect and tenderness. The memorials of the Christian faith which Evangelists and Apostles have left us, abound with honorable notices of the female sex. It is most worthy of observation, that our Lord always treated women with special consideration. It was with a woman of Samaria that he conversed on the great themes of his own mission and the spiritual worship of the Father, it was the dwelling of the sisters of Lazarus that he appears to have visited on terms of the greatest intimacy, and it was to Mary Magdalene that he first presented himself on the morning of his resurrection. It would be impossible, I conceive, for any one to read

the New Testament attentively, and not be impressed by the manner in which woman is noticed there. Under the influence of the truths which it inculcates, and the dispositions which it fosters, her sex has risen out of the condition to which heathen customs consigned her, and stands before us, in the essential qualities of her nature, the equal of man; no longer his slave, but his friend, his counsellor, and his support. The mother, — whose office is so important as hers? The authority of President, and Emperor, is less than that which she exercises. While they guide or restrain outward action, she forms the inward character; they manage the affairs of a nation, she may determine the destinies of a soul. The influence which she exerts where there is least to counteract its effects is felt in years, and ages, afterwards. The wife, — whose persuasion so irresistible, whose love fills so large a place in the heart, whose departure causes such dreariness to come over life! The daughter, — mark her gentle obedience, her sweet graces, her growing excellence, and say if the home which contains no daughter, however rich in other gifts, be not poverty-stricken. The sister, — sincere, affectionate, prompt to bestow her welcome or her sympathy, — who that ever had a sister would consent to live without one? But I am borne away by my own thoughts from the purpose before me. I meant only to say, that women are entitled to the respectful attention of a Christian community, in every suit which they may urge, and that it is as unchristian as it is uncourteous, to turn a deaf ear to their solicitations.

They are women, who ask us to increase their ability

in a work of beneficence, which they have undertaken. And it is in behalf of the suffering ones of their own sex, that they press this demand. Poor and afflicted women are the objects of this charity. Can we conceive of a class having a larger title to our sympathy? If, when she moves in health amidst prosperous scenes, woman still needs and covets support from manly strength, what must be her need when sickness has wasted her frame, and poverty blighted her energies? *A poor woman*, — there is a pathos in that simple description that should pierce all our hearts. And why are there so many poor women here, and in every city of Christendom? Because, while the gospel has corrected to a considerable extent the unjust treatment of their sex, which prevailed before the coming of Christ, it has not yet taught the world to do them justice under circumstances of destitution and absolute dependence. The age of chivalry has passed, when beautiful damsels were placed under the protection of gallant knights; but the time has not yet come for a Christian appreciation of the claims of decrepid and lonely females. A poor man may overcome the difficulties of his situation, and acquire a competent subsistence; but a poor woman, God help her, if she be left to herself! And she will be left to herself, unless the hand of charity be extended to her, for the hand of justice is closed against her. It is one of the darkest features in our social condition, that Societies for the relief of indigent women must be multiplied, because they cannot obtain what justice ought to bestow. Is this a Christian civilization, where one of that sex, whose delicacy of frame, and native delicacy

of mind, should forbid her being doomed to unbroken and almost unrequited toil, is permitted, nay,— let me utter the whole truth, — is compelled to labor as no Roman slave was made to drudge, as no criminal is allowed to wear himself out? Is this a Christian civilization? No. It is Heathen barbarity. It is Pagan selfishness. Do you ask me how the usages of our community can be changed? It belongs to others to answer that question. It belongs to me, and you, and every one, to expose the enormity of customs which allow a poor girl, suffering from an excruciating disease, that almost incapacitates her for exertion, to sit at her needle all day, and on completing a thick kerseymere vest, after two days' hard work, — I am stating a fact given in one of the Reports of this Society, — to receive thirty cents! A poor girl, as virtuous and as sensitive as any one of us, standing in need of lodging, food, clothing, medicine, and the comforts which alleviate mortal suffering; forced, by the 'tyranny of employers,' and the unconcern of the community, to supply these various wants out of the sum of ninety cents a week, earned by the most painful industry! It is a shame, a disgrace, which the boasted intelligence and philanthropy of our day should not suffer to remain. Shall no song be sung in the dreary apartment of the poor seamstress, but the Song of the Shirt, whose burthen is ever the same, — at morning and at midnight, — Work, work, work? I have said, God help the poor; I say now, God forgive us, who let this abomination of cruelty continue! God have mercy on the hard-hearted, who show no mercy!

The beneficiaries of this charity are not only women, poor and aged women; they are persons who have been called to the sorest of all earthly bereavements. They are widows. What a weight of misery, does that word declare, has fallen on the heart! When the prophet of Israel, whose lamentation over the sins and sufferings of his nation constitutes one of the most affecting productions of human or inspired genius, sought for an image under which he might present the most vivid picture of the wretchedness that had overtaken the people, he found none, he could have found none, more apt than the mournful exclamation, — "We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows." The cup of suffering had been drained to the dregs, and the sad tale was told in this one line. When the Evangelist wished to portray the grief which Jesus turned into rejoicing at the gates of Nain, he said more in a single word than if he had framed many sentences of rhetorical description, — "A dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a *widow*." The desolation of widowhood is too sacred for idle words. If there be one — and there are probably many — in this house, who have known what it is by their own experience, it is enough for me to say to them, that these are widows, whose distress they are invited to assuage. To those who have never known what the rupture of the heart's dearest attachment is, let me only say, that she who is a widow has lost the arm on which she leaned, and the bosom on which she rested. He who knew her anxieties, and provided for her comfort, who smoothed the way of

life before her feet, and held her up as they crossed its difficult passages, who stood between her and all harm, and shared with her the pain which he could not avert; from whom she kept no secret, but in whom she placed the utmost confidence; he who was at once her protector and her friend, with whom her own heart was knit by a thousand hidden associations and nameless offices of love; whose presence habit had made as needful as affection had made it dear, has been taken from her, and she is indeed bereft. The earth seems to her lonely, the sky cold, life itself a burthen or a waste, and only her faith in God gives her composure or strength. She is poor, too, and almost, perhaps actually, friendless. Oh, the severity of her lot! God is good even to her, but it is hard for her to see his goodness through all that she suffers. "Sad is the widow's lot," says one of the Reports of this Society, with perfect truth, "Sad is the widow's lot when alleviated by the sympathies of numerous friends, and the possession of every comfort and luxury; a pall is indeed thrown over a world once radiant and beautiful in her eyes, and the rainbow of promise no more spans the fair prospect of life. But all that can relieve in the soothing influences of retirement, in the variety of intellectual gratification, in the delights of travel or the pleasures of a happy home, are denied the *poor* widow. She finds no time to indulge her grief, or to revel in sweet recollections of the past; no change of scene, no variety of occupation, enables her for a while to forget her sorrows. An absorbing anxiety for the supply of the bare necessities of her family often

drinks up her spirits, and brings her to an early grave." This is not an overwrought description. Go with me, my hearer, to a chamber in one of the crowded buildings where the poor congregate. It is scantily furnished. There sits a solitary mourner. It is the room in which her husband died; and there, amidst the associations with which illness and death have hung its walls, she spends the long day, or thither returns at night from her hard toil, to be welcomed by solitude and grief. Look at her thin and ill-clad figure, mark the lines which sorrow has traced on her countenance, see what inadequate provision of fuel or raiment she has made for the coming winter; then let the sad truth occur to you, that she has no one on whom she may call to relieve her necessities, but must bear her penury and her affliction as she can, alone, forgotten or unknown; and tell me if you are not moved to take pity on her distress, and to help these kind-hearted women to comfort her in her widowhood.

I have spoken of her whom the guardians of this charity visit, as alone, and often do they find the widows whom they assist in utter loneliness. But there are others, of whom it is difficult to say whether their situation be less or more painful. They have children clinging around them, and crying for bread which they cannot give, or a cheerful word which heaviness of heart will not let them utter. These fatherless ones are also the objects of our Society's bounty. They need it. Yes, and more, much more than this Society can give, do they often need. Childhood, — there is a charm in that word, when it recalls

to our minds happy faces, active frames, and innocent hearts; but let it bring before our mental sight a form emaciated by hunger, clad in ragged or squalid apparel, on whose infant features not only has want pressed its unseemly fingers, but neglect and vice have stamped their memorials, and what spectacle will awaken such mingled feelings of compassion and disgust? The child, in the costliest mansion requiring care for its helplessness, and in the best ordered home needing instruction that shall save it from error and sin, here exposed to the evils which gather around the haunts of poverty and shame. And why are these children living in such want and peril? Because God has removed the parent who would have thrown his strength as a protection around their weakness, and led them up the pathway of life till they could walk in safety by themselves. Widowhood and childhood meeting in the same apartment, and bewailing their common loss; the one, perhaps, but half conscious of the extent of that loss, though suffering every moment in consequence, while the other feels the pang of its own bereavement tenfold increased by the presence of these little ones looking around in vain for guidance and subsistence. For sweet pity's sake, for holy charity's sake, let us not turn away from that apartment till we have done something for its unhappy inmates.

I shall go to my home from this place, and there shall I see my children sleeping sweetly in comfortable beds, with the ruddy countenances which wholesome food and healthful exercise have given them, and the placid expression resting on their features,

which comes from hearts as yet untainted by vice. To-morrow morning their happy voices will wake me, and through the day their light steps and cheerful noise will gladden my dwelling. Can I look on them, and not be stung with self-reproach, if I have felt no concern for the fatherless children who are pining in physical, or perishing in moral destitution around me? My own home will rebuke me for my avarice, and condemn me for my selfishness.

These fatherless ones, who may now be saved by a little judicious kindness bestowed on their widowed parents, if left to the unaided care of needy mothers, will grow up to be a pest and terror to the community. Already is our city nourishing within its bosom hundreds of youth who disturb its peace, and swell the lists of its convicted, or unknown, criminals, — yes, nourishing with the opportunities of vicious indulgence those whom it should surround with the sanctities of law and love. And whence come these youthful marauders, whose tastes incline them to seek the opportunities of sinful gratification? Mainly from the abodes over which a father's authority exerts no control, where a sick or indulgent mother leaves her children to join such associates and form such habits as make his ruin certain. Let us not blame her for not imposing a restraint which she would be unable to enforce. *We* rather are to be blamed, who offer her no counsel or assistance in maintaining her parental rights. At our door will lie the sin of that child's destruction, if he be lost. We, who might have guided or encouraged the maternal heart, said it did not concern us, though we

knew it did concern us as men, as citizens, and as Christians; and the fruit of our falsehood we shall reap in the growing disorder of the place of our residence, and in the requisition that will be made on us by the righteous Judge, to answer for our neglect of one of the plainest social duties.

"Visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction." The Society whose purposes I am describing, fulfils this part of "pure and undefiled religion." Its managers go among the objects of their charity. They *visit* their beneficiaries; not once or twice a year, to carry them the little pecuniary allowance which they are able to distribute, but constantly, to advise, and comfort, and cheer them. It would be a most false principle, on which we should estimate the value of their charitable offices by the amount of money which they may drop into the widow's lap. Needful as this is to keep her and her children from bodily suffering, it is the least part of the benefit which she receives. Thankful as she is for this addition to her narrow means of subsistence, she could tell you, if you would yourself visit her, that this Society has laid her under a still larger obligation of gratitude. These ladies, who ask you to augment their power of usefulness, have in their own hearts that which is worth more than all your money, and which they freely bestow. Kindness and sympathy they bear to the unfortunate, and bind up their sorrows with gentle words, and give them friendly counsel in their perplexities, and lead their aching hearts to the rest which Christ has promised, their smitten souls to the peace which comes from trust in God.

Who will not pronounce this a higher form of beneficence than mere almsgiving? This is an imitation of Jesus in his ministry among the poor and sorrowful. He gave them his gospel and his life, richer gifts than if by his miraculous power he had placed piles of gold within their reach. If it were proper to detain you with extracts from the reports of the Trustees of this Society, I might accumulate upon your conviction the proofs of their fidelity in discharging the highest functions of Christian beneficence. But why need I suppose you to be so ignorant, either of the forms under which sympathy with the poor expresses itself, or of the character of these ladies, as to require an array of evidence? You know that he is the best friend, who helps another to bear his misfortunes with patience, or to surmount them by effort; and you are not strangers to the disinterested zeal with which they who conduct the affairs of this association devote themselves to errands of mercy.

For thirty-two years has the Fatherless and Widows' Society been true to its name and design. Within that period on how many desolate hearts has it enkindled the fires of gratitude and hope! In some years it has accomplished more than in others, according to the ability with which it was clothed by the confidence of its friends, and the discoveries with which Providence rewarded its benevolent quest after the needy. The last year it has divided its annual resources among 284 widows and 192 fatherless children. And what do you suppose, my hearers, is the amount of income, derived from all sources, permanent and fluctuating, which it has distributed? I am

ashamed to tell you. I fear that you will think I am putting your credulity to the test. It was less than $900. You can easily calculate how much each of its beneficiaries has received. Between three and four dollars is the average sum which, in any year, has been given to one person. It might almost excite a smile to hear of such a distribution of charitable relief. And yet when you find in one of these Reports a poor woman speak with satisfaction of the expenditure of *three cents*, without which she must have endured the gnawings of hunger, you may believe that three dollars would constitute a fund from which she might long draw relief. We do not know what the poor suffer, nor do we know how much it is within our power to diminish their suffering. That sum — perhaps it was a dollar, perhaps five times this amount — which you expended, my friend, upon the luxuries of the table last week, or upon some personal gratification, so brief in its duration that you have already forgotten how your money was spent — would have lightened an anxious heart for weeks. Give according to your real ability to night, practise, it may be, a little self-denial, which yet shall not pinch you in the least, and through the whole of the winter, on whose threshold we are standing, many a sorrowful one may be relieved of anxieties that now crush her to the earth.

Let me not lead you to underrate the usefulness of this Society. I have said that less than nine hundred dollars was distributed from its income the past year. But, probably more than twice that amount has been given by the Trustees to those whom they

have visited. Whence did this addition come? You have anticipated the answer. From these ladies themselves. They could not see the assistance which, as almoners of this charity, they were enabled to furnish, still leaving urgent wants unsupplied, and therefore from their personal resources they have doubled and trebled the sum which was intrusted to their disposal; converting the pittance into something like sufficient aid. It has been an exercise of generosity honorable to them, but it reflects no credit on those whose meagre contributions compelled these ladies to make up the deficiency which it pained them to observe.

For more than thirty years has this Society pursued its noiseless way, marking the spots over which its footsteps have passed only by the comfort and gratitude that have sprung up beneath its presence. Some of its beneficiaries have outlived all their early friends, and now, at the age of threescore years and ten, are waiting for their departure, cheered by the thought, that a kind hand will not be wanting, to smooth their last pillow. Some of them have not reached the prime of life, widowed before time had effaced their youthful charms, and left to struggle through weary years with penury and sorrow. Many of them once dwelt in comfort, some in elegance; to whom the recollections of other days make more painful the contrast of their present condition. All are dependent on this Society for relief, without which their lot must be hard indeed. With all that this Society can do for them, it will be hard enough. Shall we enable these friends of the fatherless and widow to carry

succor to many a cheerless apartment, and warmth to many a heart which suffering has chilled? Shall we say to them, Go on in your beneficent ministration, occupying a wider field, and affording more substantial relief to these poor sufferers, than ever before? Shall we make them the almoners of a liberal bounty, or the distributors of a stinted charity? Your present contributions, Christian hearers, will furnish the reply to these questions.

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Any lady becomes a member of this Society by paying annually the sum of one dollar or upwards. The sum of twenty-five dollars, paid into the Treasury at any one time, constitutes the subscriber a life-member.